

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 02836 181132Z

41

ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6628

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BENC, ELAB, MR

SUBJECT: LANG/PRITCHARD SUGAR REFINERY PROJECT

REF: (A) NOUAKCHOTT 2627, (B) NOUAKCHOTT 2777

1. LANG ENGINEERING VICE PRESIDENTS BRAMPTON (OPERATIONS), JENNINGS (CONSTRUCTION) AND SILVERFARB (PERSONNEL) TOOK INITIATIVE TO BRIEF AMBASSADOR NOVEMBER 12 ON SUGAR REFINERY. ATMOSPHERE WAS RELAXED AND OPEN, IN SHARP CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS SESSION (REF A). LANG CREW EXPRESSED GUARDED OPTIMISM; OVERALL IMPRESSION WAS GENERALLY UPBEAT.

2. BRAMPTON, AS SPOKESMAN, REPORTED CONSIDERABLE SATISFACTION WITH STATUS OF PROJECT, WITH CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS RECORDED IN PAST TWO MONTHS BY NEW CONSTRUCTION BASS AND HIS TEAM, AND WITH GENERAL IMPROVEMENT IN APPROACH AND OPERATIONS NOW EVIDENT AT SITE. HE NOTED WITH PLEASURE AND PRIDE THAT NUMBER OF MAURITANIANS IN LANG WORKFORCE EXCEEDS FIRM'S MOST OPTIMISTIC PROJECTIONS MANY TIMES, EXPLAINING MAURITANIANS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THEIR ABILITY TO DEVELOP INTO SKILLED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS. LANG NOW EXPECTS TO BE ABLE TO REACH MECHANICAL COMPLETION BY END JANUARY. IN PART BY RAISING STANDARD WORK WEEK FROM 50 TO 60 HOURS FOR EXPATRIATES AND FOR MAURITANIANS IF DG LABOR CONCURS. BRAMPTON CONCLUDED THAT HE

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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 02836 181132Z

AND OTHER LANG EXECUTIVES ARE ENCOURAGED BY SIGNS THAT

GIRM MANAGERS ARE BEGINNING (AT LAST) TO TAKE HOLD OF SUGAR PROJECT: FIRST RAW SUGAR REPORTEDLY IS SLATED TO ARRIVE NOUAKCHOTT MID-DECEMBER; LONG-AWAITED TECHNICAL DISCUSSIONS ON PIPELINE CONNECTIONS, ETC. ARE SCHEDULED BETWEEN LANG STAFF AND GIRM TECHNICAL ADMINISTRATION PERSONNEL IN NEXT TEN DAYS. FINALLY, LANG TRAINING PROGRAM FOR REFINERY OPERATORS AND MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL CONTINUES TO GO VERY WELL.

3. PATH NOT TOTALLY SMOOTH, HOWEVER. ON LANG SIDE, USUAL LOSSES AND DELIVERY SLIPPAGES OF MATERIAL APPEAR TO BE MORE SERIOUS IN CASE OF NOUAKCHOTT REFINERY. SUPPLY PIPELINE IS TO BE RECHECKED (ESPECIALLY PORT OF DAKAR) URGENTLY, AND DEFICIENCIES FIRMLY ESTABLISHED BY END NOVEMBER IN ORDER TO PERMIT PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION. IF RECHECK REVEALS SUPPLY SHORTFALLS ARE NO WORSE THAN USUAL, END OF JANUARY DATE CAN BE MET. MORE SERIOUS ARE (A) CONTINUING LACK OF MAURITANIAN MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION TO RUN COMPLETED REFINERY AND RESULTANT INABILITY OF GIRM TO MAKE LENGTHENING SERIES OF KEY DECISIONS ON OPERATIONS, PSUPPLY AND PERSONNEL, AND (B) STILL UNRESOLVED QUESTION OF SOURCE OF ENORMOUS QUANTITY OF FRESH WATER (IN ADDITION TO EQUALLY LARGE AMOUNT OF SEA WATER) REQUIRED FOR OPERATION OF REFINERY. AT FULL CAPACITY (167 TONS SUGAR PER DAY), REFINERY REQUIRES BETWEEN 25 AND 30 PERCENT OF CAPITAL'S TOTAL EXISTING FRESH WATER SUPPLY. FORTUNATELY, PLANT IS DESIGNED TO BE OPERATED (ALBIET LESS EFFICIENTLY) EITHER AT MUCH LOWER CONTINUOUS CAPACITIES OR ON INTERMITTENT BASIS.

4. ON OUR SIDE, WE ARE GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT LANG HAS SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED BAD PATCH, AND THAT REFINERY PROJECT WILL CONTINUE TO PROGRESS WITH ONLY THE USUAL QUOTA OF FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL CLIFF-HANGERS.

HANDYSIDE

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Message Attributes

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